



FLO Direct News

A Newsletter Supporting Diplomatic Families from the Family Liaison Office

Fall 2009

In this issue:

<i>What's News in FLO?</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Unaccompanied Tours Tips from the Field.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Suggested Readings from the UT Book Club</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Family Member Hiring Mechanisms and Security Clearances</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Using Your Executive Order Eligibility for Non-Competitive Hiring: Tips for Those Seeking Employment Outside of the Beltway</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Distance Learning for Family Members</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Tips and Lessons Learned from an Evacuee</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>2010 Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>FLO Online Resources and Staff List.....</i>	<i>12</i>

FLO: Focus on Advocacy

We often tell people that “FLO is an advocacy office”, but what does that mean? FLO has a list of advocacy issues that we constantly re-evaluate, and which we constantly work on. These include (but are not limited to) Members of Household (MOHs), funding for Professional Development Fellowships, developing resources for resiliency, having CLOs at every unaccompanied post, additional funding to make CLO Training mandatory, and more.

We believe that “soft advocacy” is the most effective strategy. As part of that strategy, we identify people and offices that will support us or whose help we need. We do our research, compile statistics and facts, have informal discussions with other offices, and then present both the issue and proposed solution up the chain. And we don’t give up! If one approach doesn’t seem to be working, we try to come up with another. On the other hand, we don’t always win. When that happens, we have to “salute and move on”, and we continue to work closely with other offices and Bureaus with the hope that we will be successful next time around or that we will be able to influence implementation of the policy, program or service.

Much of what FLO does is related to advocacy, as many of the issues we push eventually end up as programs or services that we offer or support. Some of our advocacy success stories include increased allowances, the two Unaccompanied Tours positions in FLO, and several employment initiatives such as the *Professional Development Fellowships* and the *Global Employment Initiatives* (GEI). But most of these successes don’t happen overnight. The Family Member Appointment is a major FLO advocacy success, but it took TEN years from conception to implementation, and we are still working on refining it and explaining it. So just because you don’t see immediate results, it doesn’t mean we aren’t working on it! If you have issues that you think we should be working on, please email us at FLO@state.gov. Thanks in advance for all of your ideas, and we hope to be able to share some more success stories with you over the next year.

- Leslie Brant Teixeira, Director of FLO

What's News in FLO?

FLO on the Road

Last quarter, FLO held outreach events at the Foreign Service Institute, Regional Job Fairs, and Open House events sponsored by the East Asian Pacific, Africa, European and Eurasian Affairs, and International Office regional bureaus. Foreign Service Generalists and Specialists brought their questions, shared their ideas with FLO, and collected information regarding single living overseas, family member employment and training, Members of Household, unaccompanied tours, transition, expeditious naturalization services, and the Community Liaison Office (CLO) program. If you plan to be at FSI this winter, please take time to see what's new at our *FLO on the Road* outreach events on **January 26th** and **February 23rd**.



Stop by our resource table at your next Job Fair or Open House!

FLO also participated in the National Preparedness Fair sponsored by the [Office of Emergency Management](#). Log on to their website to find useful links to the Department's domestic emergency management program, and helpful checklists for your safety that can be used around the world.

Community Liaison Office (CLO) Training

FLO conducted three sessions of regional CLO Training last quarter. Sixty-two CLOs and CLO Assistants participated in the sessions held in Johannesburg, South Africa and Garmisch, Germany. In addition to FLO staff, the Regional Education Officer, and the Global Employment Advisors and HR Assistants from Pretoria and Berlin shared helpful information with participants. In 2010, FLO plans to hold three sessions in the spring and three in the fall.

Global Outreach

FLO visited 33 posts in 2009, hosting town-hall meetings and brown bag discussions to hear your concerns, provide updates on FLO initiatives and services, and meet individually with employees and family members. During these visits we like to highlight a few key resources, like the Department's agreement with *Manpower, Inc.* that allows spouses and partners to access over 4,000 professional courses (taught in 13 languages) for FREE! Please see www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21630 for details. There are also the *Professional Development Fellowships* for family members, with grants for up to \$2,000. During 2009, we provided 120 grants, totaling \$197,000. In 2010, we will provide individual grants of up to \$2,500. The next tranche will be announced soon so stay tuned.

Finally, we let people know during these outreach visits that if they are considering an unaccompanied tour, FLO has valuable resources to help them and can offer information, resources and assistance during the separation, as well as after the reunion. More information about this is available on our website at: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm.

Unaccompanied Tour Family Members in the Metro Area Meet and Greet

Diplomatic Rooms Reception Tour

In September, FLO organized a tour of the Department's Diplomatic Reception Rooms for unaccompanied tour (UT) employees and family members in the DC area. Spouses, couples, parents, and FLO representatives were among those who toured the premier collection of early American paintings, furniture, and decorative arts dating from 1740 thorough the late 19th century. Afterwards, the group met for coffee and exchanged ideas, information, and asked questions.

FLO was delighted to receive these kind words from some of those in attendance:

"My husband and I enjoyed it (the tour) very much. I am looking forward to attending more of the events from FLO."

"We'd like to thank you and your colleagues for all the work and energy that you put into the meet up. It was very pleasant and informative."

You're very welcome. Your feedback encouraged FLO to continue planning opportunities for family members to meet and connect with one another, and show the Department's support of and commitment to employees serving at high-threat, high-stress unaccompanied posts and their family members.

Meet and Greet with the Director General

Earlier this month, FLO Unaccompanied Tours (UT) staff organized another community outreach event for employees and family members in the DC area. Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Human Resources, Nancy J. Powell joined FLO and families for pizza and a relaxing Sunday afternoon. Ambassador Powell answered questions and listened to the concerns and comments regarding the impact of unaccompanied tours on families.

FLO staff was also on hand to answer questions and provide related resources for managing unaccompanied tours, family member training, and communicating with children. More information about unaccompanied tours can be found on FLO's internet site at www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo. Questions or other feedback? Email FLO's UT staff at FLOaskUT@state.gov. We look forward to hearing from you.



Director General Nancy Powell with outgoing employee and family member

Unaccompanied Tours Families Share *Tips from the Field*

Find the most recent tips from employees and family members on unaccompanied tours around the world that were submitted to FLO at FLOaskUT@state.gov.

A penny for your thoughts

My wife is serving on an unaccompanied tour in Kabul. In order to help the children learn something about Afghanistan and feel closer to my wife, we spent the week before our daughter's ninth birthday learning all about Afghanistan. Instead of presents on her birthday, we asked her friends to bring pennies so we could give them to Greg Mortenson's *Pennies For Peace* program. The party was a huge success; everyone learned something, we collected a huge jar of pennies to give away and my daughter loved telling her mom all about it. Learn more at www.penniesforpeace.org.

You say it's your birthday...

Create a family calendar, either electronic or print. My wonderful husband did this for me BEFORE he left for Islamabad and it has been great. We have all the normal birthdays (yep I remembered my mother-in-law's), plus we update it with the kids soccer games, important tests...the whole family has gotten involved! We all feel connected and it has really helped remembering those easy to forget dates.

You don't always have to color in the lines

We took family photos and converted them to black and white coloring books for the kids. There's a pretty easy-to-follow online guide using computer programs like PhotoShop or other photo manipulation software at www.ehow.com/how_2311270_make-coloring-book-digital-pictures.html. There are also tips on how to assemble a coloring book once you printed out the images (just remember to use heavier paper stock especially when coloring with markers) that can be found here: www.ehow.com/how_4855139_make-coloring-book-young-children.html.

All things considered

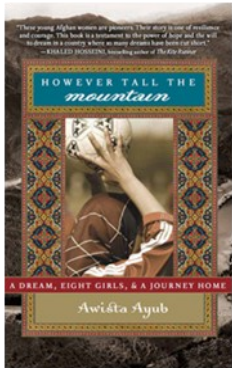
I'm at a PRT in Iraq and because things change here so quickly, I contacted one of the State people over there to find out about what it was really like and what I needed to bring, what it was like traveling there, and how internet/phone is set up so I could tell my family ahead of time what to expect. I also asked if there was anything the people at the PRT missed that I could bring out with me. Yes, I only brought one suitcase, but actually mailed them a little 'care package' before I left. Even though I arrived dusty and tired, I made a good first impression!

The final countdown

If you find yourself near the end of an unaccompanied tour or nearing a R&R, and are curious about what to expect, there is an [employee guide](#) and [family member guide](#) that focus on common issues employees and family members face when reuniting, preparing for a reunion, positively coping with transition, and how to get help. Check out the other articles and guides at www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/posttraumaticstressdisorder.html.

Suggested Readings from the UT Book Club

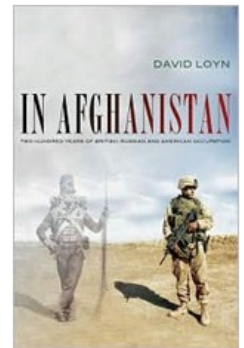
***However Tall the Mountain* by Awista Ayab**



This book illustrates how small things can make a huge difference. Eight girls, aged 10 to 16, are brought to the U.S. to play American style soccer for six weeks in 2004. All had lived through the nightmare era of the Taliban and some had been prevented from attending school. In the U.S., they were exposed not only to American culture, but were playing an organized sport that attracted crowds of people. The author is the director of the Afghan Youth Sports Exchange and emigrated from Kabul to Connecticut when the Soviet coup took over the country in 1978. The book follows the girls in the U.S. and back to their war-torn towns in Afghanistan.

***In Afghanistan* by David Loyn**

Normally we stick to fiction books, but this is non-fiction and we think you might enjoy reading it. Loyn does a good job of covering the history of the country. Occasionally the book is difficult to read due to the sheer amount of detail the author uses and also due to some of the violence he talks about but FLO UT book club readers found they could skip parts and still enjoy it. Loyn has 30 years of experience as a foreign correspondent, much of it spent in Afghanistan. He seems to have a huge knowledge of the Taliban and the forces inside the country.



***Trespassing* by Uzma Aslam Khan**



This book has a cornucopia of characters and locations - mulberry farms, student cafeterias, bus body shops, water authorities, and American academia in the throes of the first Gulf war. Daanish has come home for his father's funeral and finds his mother has planned a marriage for him. Instead of accepting the woman Daanish's mother has chosen for him, he falls for Dia - a strong, modern, woman in love with the business of silk worms. They both have secrets in their lives, some of which they themselves are not aware. This book is an interesting peek into Pakistani lives and family and is fun read with great snapshots of modern life in Pakistan.

Family Member Hiring Mechanisms and Security Clearances

Are you interested in family member employment and not sure how it all works? FLO's family member employment team has just the information you need. Read on for a brief summary of hiring mechanisms and how they work.

Overseas Family Member Hiring Mechanisms

Family Member Appointment (FMA) – This hiring mechanism is used to employ U.S. citizen Eligible Family Members (EFMs) working in U.S. embassies and consulates. The FMA, first introduced on May 24, 1998, allows family members to earn employment benefits, including:

- [Annual and sick leave](#)
- [Federal Employees Retirement System \(FERS\)](#)
- [Federal Employees Health Benefits \(FEHB\)](#)
- [Federal Employees Group Life Insurance \(FEGLI\)](#)
- [Thrift Savings Plan \(TSP\)](#)
- [Non-Competitive Hiring Eligibility](#)

Intermittent No Work Scheduled (INWS) Status – When EFMs resign from FMAs before the end of the 5-year appointment period, they go into INWS status, and continue as “inactive” employees of the Department. This allows them to apply for jobs open to “DOS employees only.” If the EFM takes a subsequent federal position, they are able to do so without a “break in service.”

Caution: security clearances held with the EFMs former position does not continue when the family member goes into INWS, although having held a security clearance makes it easier and faster to validate a new clearance.

The **Temporary Appointment (TEMP)** is for work up to one year or when there is an irregular or intermittent work schedule.

The **Personal Services Agreement (PSA)** can be used for non-U.S. citizen EFMs, Members of Household, U.S. Resident Hires, and Overseas Summer Hires.

For detailed information about these and other hiring mechanisms, log on to FLO's employment sites at: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21641.htm.

Eligibility Earned Under Government Appointments

Non-Competitive Appointment Eligibility - Executive Order 12721 enables certain EFMs to be appointed non-competitively to the Civil Service once they return to the U.S. Those individuals may be appointed to any federal occupation and grade level for which they are qualified. EFMs must have worked a minimum of 52 weeks in an overseas FMA or TEMP qualifying position. More information about this is available at: www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21651.htm.

Security Clearances

Once a federal job offer has been made, EFMs are eligible to receive an interim security clearance. Upon leaving a federal job, an EFM's security clearance may be revalidated within two years after vacating the position. For general information, visit www.state.gov/m/ds/clearances. Questions can be mailed to securityclearance@state.gov.

Using Your Executive Order Eligibility for Non-Competitive Hiring: Tips for Those Seeking Employment Outside of the Beltway

One of our family members recently wrote FLO and shared how she successfully used her Executive Order Eligibility for non-competitive hiring for a civil service position in another USG agency far away from Washington, D.C. With her permission we are sharing her helpful hints. She wrote:

It wasn't easy since, as you can probably imagine, no one here knew about E.O. 12721 but this list may help other family members who will relocate outside the DC area or maybe even the State Department.

1. **Understand how E.O. 12721 works.** Log on to www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c21651.htm.
2. **Keep copies of all your paperwork with you, especially the SF-50.** Your SF-50 states that you are appointed as an Eligible Family Member.
3. **Keep a copy of the Foreign Service employee's SF-50 with your paperwork.**
4. **Apply for jobs that say "status candidates."** The rating officer passes all of these applications to the selecting officer. (*For public status jobs, only the top three are forwarded to the selecting officer.*)
5. **Include this statement from FLO's website on your application.**

"This SF-50 documents my service in a qualifying position overseas in which I earned non-competitive status under Executive Order 12721. The details of this eligibility are outlined in 5 CFR 315.608, which states that an individual who has completed fifty-two weeks of this service may be appointed non-competitively to a competitive service position. If you require further clarification of this eligibility, please contact the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), which issued the regulations regarding this hiring authority. Thank you."

Good luck! These small steps may help you to advise our family members what to expect outside State Department but also the importance of being extremely well organized and carry ALL your paperwork with you. At the end, that is what saved me.

- gainfully employed family member

Questions? Contact FLOAskEmployment@state.gov

Distance Learning for Family Members

Department of State EFMs may request access to [Fastrac](#) or enroll in FSI-Custom produced distance learning courses such as *Rosetta Stone* by completing a DS-755 training request on FSI's intranet catalog. EFMs without intranet access should coordinate with their sponsoring direct-hire to submit training requests.

Online Enrollment Instructions for EFMs are as follows:

1. Go to FSI's catalog on the intranet, <http://fsi.state.gov/admin/reg/default.asp?Cat=Course%20Catalog&Top=%20Course%20Listings>
2. Search and Select the desired course
3. Scroll to the bottom of the course page and click "Apply Now"
4. Fill out the login page with personal information
5. Complete the form as follows:
 - a. For "employee type" select "EFM" Enter sponsor's name.
 - b. For Agency enter "DEPARTMENT OF STATE."
 - c. Select "Domestic Bureau" and "Office" from drop-down menu.

OR

 - d. Select "Overseas Post" from drop-down menu.
 - e. Enter sponsoring employee's CDO as Training Officer/CDO
 - f. Select "Submit Request"
6. The application will be routed electronically to designated supervisor and training officer for approval.
7. Enrollment confirmation e-mails will be sent to applicant throughout the approval process. A final e-mail is sent when application has been fully approved and processed by the FSI Registrar.

Crisis Management and Support

Tips and Lessons Learned From an Evacuee

Everyone should be prepared for unexpected departures from post. Regardless of whether you are an entry level officer or a seasoned employee, have a family or not, you may have to evacuate at any time for civil unrest, a natural disaster, health reasons, etc. This year some of the evacuees who left on Authorized or Ordered Departure had just arrived at post, others were on R&R with their families at the time and could not return until the evacuation was over, etc. It is important for all of us to plan ahead. Start by reviewing FLO's website on Contingency Planning and Evacuations at www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c1991.htm.

Last October, FLO's Crisis Management and Security Officer invited one of the Conakry evacuees to share some tips and lessons learned from her experience, at a recent FSI Security Overseas Seminar. It was a big success!

Contact Information

Provide emergency contact and personal safehaven information to post HR when you first arrive, and keep it updated. Maintain a current list of important post and personal contacts. When leaving post

for any reason (R&R, official business, etc.), leave contact information with the Management Officer for wherever you are staying (home or hotel), your personal email address, and cell phone number.

Organizing Documents, Your Suitcase, and Pets

- Make sure contact information and other vital documents (including medical and school) are together and easily accessible. You can scan them and put them on CD, thumb drive, memory stick, etc. Consider emailing important information to yourself as a back-up. Make sure that all household members know how to locate this information.
- Make a detailed emergency packing list and keep it in your suitcase. Include work clothes/suits; employees should pack for DC climate, even if you are going to an Interim Stopover location first. Don't forget your prescription medications.
- Make sure you have at least a \$10,000 credit limit on a credit card available and at least \$500 USD in cash at all times. (It may be useful to have a certain amount of local currency as well.)
- Prepare a list, and if you have time, put aside what you want in your air freight (250 lbs. for one person, 400 lbs for two and 600 lbs. for three or more).
- Make a plan for your pets. Be prepared to take them with you. Keep immunizations and records up-to-date, and your pet's carrier ready. If you can't take them, find someone who can care for them; leave sufficient food for several months, and your keys to check on them if they remain in your residence for a period of time.

Home Preparations and Communication

- Take radio checks seriously; make sure your children know how to use the embassy radio, in case you are not home when an important call comes in. Keep the radios charged!
- Have a family plan for where you would go during an evacuation. Especially if the employee is considered to be emergency personnel, part of a tandem couple with children, or the spouse and children are interested in going to an Alternate Foreign Safehaven, look into what your possibilities, the process and relevant allowances, are and plan accordingly.
- Should you evacuate, leave your house and car keys with emergency personnel (i.e. the RSO or Management). Leave a check or cash with someone at post for household staff salaries, pet evacuation tickets, or to pay for other local bills, etc.
- In the event of a lockdown, make sure you have at least 10 days worth of non-perishable food and two weeks of water in your residence at all times.
- Keep your gas tank $\frac{3}{4}$ full, as you never know when the gas station may shut down.

FLO contacts post to provide guidance and support as soon as we are aware that a crisis is emerging. We would love to hear about your own evacuation experience and lessons learned via FLOAskEvacuation@state.gov.

2010 Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program

By Paula S. Jakub, RHU

Executive Vice President, American Foreign Service Protective Association

Federal Employees Benefits Open Season is upon us and it is especially important to review your coverage to make sure it will meet your needs in 2010.

It is a widely known fact that the cost of health care is rising. Utilization, medical technology and medical inflation play major factors in this cost increase. In fact, private studies predict medical costs next year will increase 11.8%. Federal employees have it a little better - the average premium increase in 2010 for employees and retirees enrolled in the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program is 8.8%. Again this year, the Government will pay an average of 70% of the premiums – not a bad deal for the excellent, comprehensive benefits available in the FEHB Program.

The new FEHB premiums will take effect the first full pay period of January 2010. FEHB Program enrollees who have Self Only coverage will pay an average of \$5.98 more bi-weekly, while those with Self and Family coverage will pay an average of \$12.87 more bi-weekly.

The Federal Employees Health Benefits Program remains a model for health care delivery systems throughout the country and, indeed, the world. Among the many reasons are:

- Choice of 235 health plans
- Competitive benefit packages
- No pre-existing condition limitation
- Eligible retirees and spouses are covered

2010 premiums (bi-weekly) for selected plans are as follows:

HEALTH PLAN	2010 Bi-Weekly Employee Premium	
	Self Only	Self and Family
BCBS Standard	\$80.81	\$185.06
FSBP	\$52.76	\$135.97
GEHA High	\$79.54	\$186.06
GEHA Standard	\$37.02	\$84.13
Mail Handlers Standard	\$76.62	\$182.90

Some things to look for in the 2010 FEHB plans include:

- Cost Effectiveness
- Preventive Care Initiatives
- Treatment Compliance and Patient Health Outcomes
- Mental Health Parity
- Health Information Technology (HIT)

Each year the individual plans of the FEHB Program offer enrollees a benefit package with comprehensive coverage at a reasonable premium. Since plans vary in their changes, it is important to know what your particular plan is doing for 2010. As in previous years, we encourage you to read carefully **Changes to this Plan in Section 2 How we change for 2010** when you receive your 2010 plan brochure.

Do not rely on premium costs alone to make your health plan decision. Things like extra deductibles and plan allowances for services, especially overseas, could end up costing you extra money. Customer service and global coverage are of paramount importance for employees and their families serving in foreign countries.

A reminder for employees enrolled in FSAFEDS – **you must re-enroll each year**. New enrollments or re-enrollments must be done through www.FSAFEDS.com or 1-877-FSAFEDS (1-877-372-3337).

Federal Employees Benefits Open Season dates are **November 9 through December 14, 2009**. Employees can make selections/changes in their FEHBP, FEDVIP and/or FSAFEDS.

This is your Open Season. Make sure you choose the plan that best serves your needs.

FLO Online Resources

FLO on the Internet

www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo

FLO on the Intranet

<http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/flo/index.cfm>

FLO strives to put as many of our resources materials on the Internet for your easy access. If you cannot find what you are looking for or experience technical difficulty, please email FLO at: FLO@state.gov. You may also contact us at (202) 647-1076 or (800) 440-0397.

FLO Websites provide information on:

[Family Member Employment](#)

[Education and Youth](#)

[Crisis Management](#)

[Support Services](#)

[Unaccompanied Tours Support](#)

[Expeditious Naturalization](#)

[Transition](#)

FLO Publications (including *FLO Direct News!*)

[The Community Liaison Office Program](#)

Questions?

For general questions: FLO@state.gov

For Education and Youth: FLOAskEducation@state.gov

For Employment: FLOAskEmployment@state.gov

For Evacuation Support: FLOAskEvacuations@state.gov

For Unaccompanied Tours: FLOAskUT@state.gov

For Expeditious Naturalization: FLOAskNaturalization@state.gov

For Family Member Training: FLOAskTraining@state.gov